

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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Oct. 7, 2008

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[electronic photo available upon request]

YOUTH DUCK HUNT IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

High speed internet, rock 'em sock 'em video games, fast food. It's really no wonder that kids have trouble standing still these days.

But standing still was exactly what Josh Mathahs and Dalton Adams were doing early last Saturday morning --- the opening day of this year's special Youth Waterfowl Season. The time was O-Dark O'clock. Barely light in the east, the 12-year-olds appeared mesmerized as they drank in the incredible sights and sounds as they viewed their first ever sunrise from a duck blind. The youngsters were accompanied on this outdoor milestone by adult duck hunt mentors, Keith Helland and Yours Truly.

As official participants of a DNR sponsored Youth Duck Hunting Adventure, the four of us had gotten acquainted the previous afternoon as youths and volunteer mentors from across north Iowa assembled at Worth County's Keenan's Quarry Park. Formal programming included an introduction to the history and traditions of waterfowl hunting, safe gun handling instructions, and a quick trip to the shooting range for a go at clay birds. The evening concluded as youths received free Ducks Unlimited duck calls, caps, and brand new mallard decoys.

According to DNR conservation officer and event organizer, Matt Washburn, the Youth Duck Hunting Adventure is designed to give Iowa youngsters the firsthand

opportunity to experience the sport of waterfowl hunting and all its trappings. The goal is to educate youngsters on waterfowl and wetland conservation and to ultimately recruit new hunters to the sport.

“The generation that grew up with hunting and fishing as part of their daily lifestyle is rapidly disappearing and hunter numbers are showing a decline,” said Washburn. “Waterfowl hunting is very traditional. It’s something that is usually passed from generation to generation.

“But not everyone has that opportunity today,” added Washburn. “Kids are extremely busy with lots of competition for their free time. An increasing number of young people never make it to the outdoors. Mentored waterfowl youth hunts are one way to provide them with that experience. Hopefully, they’ll like what they see and will want to come back.”

Following a short night’s sleep the plan was put to action as hunt teams reassembled and headed for the water. Our particular foursome arrived on the marsh about an hour before sunrise. In spite of the early hour, there was plenty to do. Helland instructed the young hunters on how to construct a quick but effective duck blind using freshly cut willows. Meanwhile, I waded out to set the decoys, which included the new mallards the youths had received the night before. Before you knew it, we were set for the hunt.

As daylight began to increase, so did the activity of resident wildlife. From a cattail clump at the opposite end of the marsh, a lone mallard noisily greeted her comrades. From high in the sky, a distant hen returned the salute. As we watched and waited, a group of green-winged teal suddenly burst on the scene. The flock executed a series of high speed passes before disappearing into the half light. The air was crisp and every sight and sound was new. By now, the boys were completely wired.

Shooting time arrived and the boys were allowed to load their guns. Seconds later, a drake mallard appeared from the north. The duck was reluctant to tarry, but some coaxing from the call finally convinced him that our fake ducks were real ducks. The bird sailed over the decoys, presenting a perfect black silhouette against the bright orange of the impending dawn.

The first shot of the day went to Mathahs. His performance was flawless. The shotgun broke the silence as the mallard folded stone dead. As the duck hit the water, Helland’s Labrador retriever, Chica, sprinted for the retrieve. The blind erupted. There were high fives, cheers, and more high fives. So many, in fact, that the sound began to resemble applause. There was no denying that we were off to a great start. With his very first shot at his very first duck, 12-year-old Josh Mathahs had bagged a prime drake mallard. The celebration was definitely in order.

The festivities were interrupted by an unexpected honk, a sound which caused us to instantly shrink deeper into our willow branch hideout. We answered the call and a

honking Canada goose soon appeared above the trees. We stepped up the calling and the goose came closer. The bird circled once, twice, three times. Finally convinced that all was well, the goose arched its neck, set its wings, and dropped the black-webbed landing gear.

From the confines of our blind, the bird loomed like a B52 approaching the runway. The bird appeared closer than it was and holding the boys back was a challenge. Then, at the optimum distance of fifteen yards, we let them take the shot. Dalton Adam's 20-gauge barked and the goose quit flying.

For the second time that morning, the blind erupted. This time, however, the jubilation defied description. Let's just say that all four of us went fully and completely, game show nuts. The look on Dalton's face was priceless --- a unique blend of excitement, utter amazement, and stunned disbelief.

The morning continued. The boys missed several teal and then bagged a second drake mallard and, amazingly, a second Canada goose. At nine o'clock it was time to head back to headquarters for bacon and eggs and to see how other youth parties had fared on their excursions. After bagging the decoys and obtaining some souvenir photos, we were ready to head out.

Mathahs and Adams insisted on carrying the game. The boys were still revved. The only time they actually stopped talking was when they paused to blast a couple notes on the new duck calls.

"This was so much fun," said Mathahs. "I wish we could start all over and do this again."

Was the Youth Duck Hunt Adventure a success? Helland and I both agreed that Mathahs' statement said it all. The most important thing was not that we had successfully bagged ducks and geese, but rather that the boys enjoyed the entire outdoor experience.

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[Electronic photo available upon request]

BOW SEASON UNDERWAY

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The early days of Iowa's archery deer season have more than 50,000 bowhunters anxious to head to the woods....if they haven't already. The nearly four month season (knocking off for a couple weeks during the December shotgun hunts) is what appeals to many bow hunters. They can pursue whitetails in the near summer conditions of

October...or pile on the layers and wait for the buck that everybody missed, during the later days of January.

Early season hunters can build their own advantage; reading the woods for deer activity and maybe taking a doe or two before the excitement of the breeding season builds in late October and into November. "It's a good time to take antlerless animals if they have that interest", suggests Tom Litchfield, deer research biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "It helps out the landowner and helps attain deer population objectives, especially in eastern, southern and central counties."

Bowhunters harvested 23,696 deer last season; 8,274 with antlerless tags. The 85,240 tags sold--any sex, landowner, nonresident and antlerless--represented a 5 percent hike from the year before.

A lot of hunters harvest a doe before their buck. Bo Jackson is one of them. The only man named to both major league baseball's All Star Game and pro football's Pro Bowl (and college's 1985 Heisman Trophy winner) is sold on Iowa deer hunting...and on shooting a doe or two. In his first season here, he filled his antlerless tag on the first night (nonresidents pay for an antlerless 'doe' tag as well their any-sex 'buck' tag). Returning to northern Iowa in the waning days of that season, he tagged another doe.

"It's important for hunters to harvest does. You don't want areas overpopulated," says Jackson. "Everybody wants to take that one big buck to get them on the cover of some magazine (but) I think it should be mandatory for everybody who hunts to take a doe first." That's why he enjoyed dropping a nice buck last fall, hunting near Iowa City.

Beyond the excitement that builds as a mature doe....or a 10-point buck...approaches your deer stand in the moments after dawn, bowhunting from a tree stand, 15 feet above the ground offers a unique outdoor observation post. Wild turkeys, raccoons and other critters crisscross below and the fall colors take on a richer hue, viewed from the 'second story' of an oak or hickory tree.

Bow hunters also get first crack at using 120,000 county-specific antlerless tags available this fall. In addition, 60 special zone hunts are provided—in parks, urban areas and other areas. Iowa's 2008 hunting regulations contain deer season information, including where to call for information on those special zones, as well as county quotas for antlerless tags. You can also find it at www.iowadnr.gov.

Bo Knows....Hunting

Tagging along as a toddler, Bo Jackson learned hunting early. "It's very important to pass the hunting tradition along," stresses the 1985 Heisman Trophy winner and professional football AND baseball star of the '80s and '90s. "My grandfather introduced me to hunting when I was 3 or 4; going along on a coon hunt. I have been hooked ever since."

Jackson spends much of the fall hunting in various states. He wants to pass along that love of the outdoors to others, just as his grandfather imparted it to him. “It is important for us as hunters in this day and age to introduce hunting to the next generation,” underscores Jackson. “If we don’t, years from now, there won’t be hunters. We have to do whatever we can to protect this heritage. It’s a privilege.”

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NOVEMBER ANTLERLESS SEASON LICENSES ON SALE NOV. 15

The November antlerless-only deer licenses go on sale Nov. 15, not on Nov. 10 as listed in the Iowa Hunting and Trapping Regulations. The season dates are Nov. 28, 29 and 30.

The November antlerless-only deer season is available in counties where the antlerless-only deer licenses quota has not been filled. Counties that no longer have antlerless licenses available include Boone, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Carroll, Chickasaw, Crawford, Floyd, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Hardin, Marshall, Mitchell, Plymouth, Story, Tama, Webster and Worth. Most counties in northwest Iowa did not receive any additional antlerless deer licenses.

The DNR has a listing of counties and number of licenses available on the web at www.iowadnr.gov, then click on licenses in the left navigation bar on the left, then click on [Current Availability of Limited Quota Deer and Turkey Licenses](#) at the bottom of the page, then on [Resident Antlerless Deer By County](#)

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AVOID FALL PLOWING – LEAVE FOOD AND COVER FOR WILDLIFE

Fall tillage practices, even reduced tillage techniques such as disking and chisel plowing, can eliminate important winter food and cover for many wildlife species in Iowa. Waste grains and crop residue remaining in untilled crop fields following harvest provide important food and cover for species such as pheasants, quail, partridge, turkey, and deer.

Studies of harvested untilled crop fields show wildlife consume 55 to 85 percent of the waste corn and soybeans between fall harvest and the following spring said Todd Bogenschutz, wildlife research biologist with the Department of Natural Resources.

“The corn stubble and stalks remaining in untilled cornfields also provide concealment cover for pheasants, quail, and partridge, so the birds are not so exposed to predators when feeding in the winter,” said Bogenschutz.

Research shows even reduced tillage methods, such as disking and chisel plowing, reduce waste grains available to wildlife by 80 percent and reduce crop stubble

by 50 percent or more, said Bogenschutz. A 1985 study showed untilled Illinois corn fields averaged of 200 pounds waste corn per acre verses 40 pounds per acre in corn fields that were disked or chisel plowed. Moldboard plowed fields averaged 4 pounds per acre.

Farmers and landowners can leave a free food plot for wildlife by simply not fall plowing their fields. "No-till farming is a great way to leave food and cover for wildlife," said Bogenschutz.

For more information, contact Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823.

GREEN IOWA AMERICORPS PROGRAM ANNOUNCED

DES MOINES – Governor Chet Culver announced yesterday the launch of 56 AmeriCorps positions in the new "Green Iowa" initiative. The mission of this new program is to assess energy saving needs in communities and provide energy-saving education and service through community outreach.

"AmeriCorps members are tackling our toughest problems, strengthening our communities, and improving the civic life of our state," said Governor Chet Culver. "They have played an important role in helping Iowans recover from this year's natural disasters, and their work continues through this innovative, new program."

The Green Iowa Corps will be managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) through a combination of funding from AmeriCorps, the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service and the Iowa Power Fund. The DNR is seeking lead organizations for projects in two specific regions; one team will be located in Linn and Johnson counties and the other in Black Hawk, Bremer and Butler counties. Members taking part in these projects will rebuild communities hit by disaster in a sustainable, green way.

The Green Iowa Corps is also in search of six qualified individuals to serve as AmeriCorps members for the next 12 months. Members will network within communities and serve as team project leaders next summer. Nine-month and three-month positions will be available in February and May of 2009.

Project sponsor site organization and member application information can be found on AmeriCorps website

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer/ Americorps/greencorps.html>

Most often described as a domestic Peace Corps, AmeriCorps is a federally funded program that enables Americans age 17 and over to commit a significant amount of time to service designed to meet community needs. In exchange for one year of service, AmeriCorps members receive a small living allowance and an education award

to help finance their college education, vocational training, or to pay back qualified student loans.

For more information on AmeriCorps or to find out how you can get involved, e-mail tricia.rummer@dnr.iowa.gov or call 515-281-4539.

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